

## Transforming the School of the Arts

In 2017, McMaster expanded its opportunities for arts programs with new performance spaces opening in L.R. Wilson Hall and the announcement of a two year “Socrates Project” that includes a spotlight on creative and performing arts. At the same time, Hamilton’s vibrant arts community continued its energetic transformation of the city, reflected in events such as the monthly James Street Art Crawl and the annual mega-festival, September’s Supercrawl.

In alignment with the expansion of new opportunities in the University and in the City of Hamilton, now is an appropriate time to review the role that the School of the Arts (SOTA) plays in teaching, research and practice in the creative and performing arts at McMaster and in the surrounding community. Earlier this year, the Provost’s office conducted an extensive review of SOTA’s structure and curriculum. McMaster’s School of the Arts has considerable assets. Dedicated faculty members work with talented students who bring considerable energy and dedication to their chosen fields. Thanks to provincial investment and philanthropic commitment to the arts, students and faculty now work in new or renovated spaces, including an innovative theatre and spectacular concert hall in the L.R. Wilson Building, as well as bright and spacious art studios in the new Fitzhenry expansion. In addition, McMaster houses one of the finest university art museum collections in Canada.

**In recent years, downtown Hamilton has emerged as a growing arts centre. At the same time, McMaster has invested in new downtown facilities to provide teaching and learning, patient care, research and administrative supports - increasing our presence there and participating in the area’s revitalization. At One James North, the David Braley Health Sciences Centre and the newly launched City Lab, we are strengthening our connections to the community and establishing a stronger foundation from which to build connections.**

The School of the Arts currently houses four arts programs: Theatre and Film (originally Drama), Art (now Studio Art), Art History and Music. Over time, the Drama program evolved into a Theatre and Film program that focuses specifically on performance and devising. The Studio Art faculty created a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) and established a strong reputation for its focus on mixed-media and sustainable art practices. The Art History program offered students early access to global art cultures and opportunities to interact with curators from the McMaster Museum of Art and the Art Gallery of Hamilton. The Music program added a specialization in Music Cognition to its Bachelor of Music program, in collaboration with the LiveLab housed in the Department of Psychology, Neuroscience & Behaviour, while continuing to offer students across campus the opportunity to participate in choirs, ensembles and music lessons.

At the same time, technological advances, especially in digital fields, and the emergence of new forms of performance and display, have considerably blurred the boundaries between individual art forms. Video art, performance art, installations, projections, soundscape design, conceptual art and many more art forms challenge more traditional approaches; so has the rise of virtual reality, internet art/drama, smart-phone filmmaking, interactive arts, among others. Health professionals and corporate leaders have come to realize that the arts are essential to an individual’s wellbeing and performance in life and career. These developments have challenged more classical modes of training and analysis of the arts and created multiple, vibrant nodes of research and teaching in many other departments, both in the Faculty of Humanities and elsewhere on campus, as well as at Mohawk College.

Following on the review of SOTA's structure and curriculum, the Provost's Office is now undertaking a major collaborative consultation with the goal of transforming the delivery of arts programming at McMaster. The McMaster community is invited to imagine and propose the kind of innovative, integrated and interdisciplinary arts-led programs that will equip graduates to work across traditional boundaries, using models such as McMaster's well-known signature programs: Arts and Science, iSci, the Bachelor of Health Sciences, and Communications and Multimedia. As part of this process many of Canada's leading experts in the creative and performing arts are also being consulted.

The possibilities for new programs are extensive. A redesigned interdisciplinary program could build a solid foundation in such areas as design, arts and social change, or arts and technology; it could build competence with multiple forms of artistic production, community engagement and arts entrepreneurship. It could offer a variety of ways to stream into specialized forms of artistic production (studio art, theatre), or artistic studies (art history, music, performance or curatorial studies), or explore the relationship between the arts and science as part of a STEAM curriculum, creating novel combinations and intersections amongst them in capstone experiences. Building on long-standing networks, the program would deliberately break down the boundaries between the University and Hamilton's arts community.

The main objective is to envision, design and implement an integrated and interdisciplinary program in the creative and performing arts that makes the most of McMaster's unique commitment to student-centered curriculum. In keeping with the spirit of those programs, McMaster will offer students a distinctive educational experience that will prepare them to excel in the arts and performance worlds of the twenty-first century.